



Testimony of
Ed Hawthorne, President
Connecticut AFL-CIO

Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2022

HB 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ed Hawthorne, and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 200,000 workers in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for updated HVAC systems in schools to provide our students, teachers, counselors, custodians, nurses, and other school staff with safe air quality standards. For too long they have been forced to work in schools with excessive heat, cold, humidity, mold, dust, and other unhealthy factors. With no enforced air quality standards in place, we have seen increased Workers Compensation claims, lost school days due to closures, high numbers of sick days taken by students, and conditions that inhibit student learning and effective teaching.

Governor Lamont's mid-term budget proposal includes funding in the Department of Administrative Services to support investments in air quality improvements at schools. However, we must go a step further and provide proper oversight mechanisms to ensure such standards are assessed and monitored. In order to do so, the Connecticut AFL-CIO, along with our coalition partners, requests that the Appropriations Committee provide funding in the Department of Labor budget to ensure staff support within ConnOSHA for responding to workplace safety reports relating to school indoor air quality. With proper assessment and monitoring, we can guarantee a regular assessment of standards and HVAC systems, require corrective action when standards are not met and ensure compliance by local boards of education.

The need for air quality standards and updated HVAC systems in our schools is essential now and should be addressed comprehensively. Oversight of any implemented standards must be considered part of the complete program to ensure the investments made for healthy school environments provide the intended outcomes. We respectfully ask this committee to fund the Department of Labor to support this assessment and monitoring program.

Thank you for your consideration.